

**Intergenerational exchange of knowledge, skills,
values and practices between self-organized
active citizens in Maribor, Slovenia**

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Our paper deals with intergenerational informal learning developed by participatory democracy process in the Self-organized District Communities (SDC) in Maribor, the second largest city in Slovenia. It is based on the assumption that SDC assemblies, being safe and trustworthy, are very powerful spaces for behavioural and values exchange between generations and also for social and political engagement, having a capacity for critical, informed and caring citizenry of all ages (Pinnington & Schugurensky, 2009). Our case study is focused on the social dimensions of acquisition of skills, knowledge, attitudes and practices, as identified by Schugurensky (2006; 2013), and on features of social learning (Serrat et al., 2016). In an embedded single-case study design with multiple units (Yin, 2012) we conducted 12 interviews and a focus group. Among interviewees, six were retired, four were employed, one was a student and one was unemployed; they were members of first, second and the third generations. Results show that besides knowledge, skills and practices gained through intergenerational political and social actions in SDC assemblies, value and attitudinal changes (also regarding

(age) are among the most important outcomes of the democratic participatory process.

Keywords: informal learning, social learning, participatory democracy, intergenerationality, citizenship.

Introduction

This article deals with the process of informal learning through participatory democratic practices in Self-organized District Communities (hereafter, SDC) in Maribor, the second largest city in Slovenia (with 100,000 inhabitants). Activities in the SDC have the characteristics of collaborative public actions established to focus on real-world problems as well as on social and political issues, such as the decline in prosperity, widespread mistrust of politicians, environmental degradation and community development (Gregorčič & Jelenc Krašovec, 2016), and to contribute to social change. To understand the process of self-organization of citizens in Maribor, a short explanation of the context is needed. Maribor is one of the Slovenian "left-behind" industrial cities where the economic and social situation worsened with the global and local financial crises. It was hit hard in 2008, which led to huge protests, riots and marches four years later. Almost 15 per cent of its citizens took to the streets, demanding the resignation of the corrupt mayor and the city council in November 2012. These protests inspired solidarity protests all over Slovenia and led to the resignation of the mayor of Maribor on 6 December 2012 and the prime minister of the National Government on 20 March 2013. Every evening at the end of 2012, 200 to 300 activists gathered in Maribor to discuss the situation; due to disagreement about priorities and goals, they established the City-wide Assembly Initiative (CAI). The CAI led demonstrations, occupations and sits-in in the municipality and made the 'content' of the protests visible by articulating it and imposed some form of co-governance, participatory democracy experiment and participatory budgeting (PB). The CAI was also the initiator of regular meetings of SDC assemblies.

In this article, we examine informal learning acquired through political participation, focusing in particular on the social dimensions of the acquisition of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and practices (KASP), as

identified by Schugurensky (2006; 2013), and on the intergenerational dimensions of social learning, as defined by Serrat, Petriwskyj, Villar and Warburton (2016). Despite the fact that activist groups are largely age segregated, the SDC assemblies were comprised of citizens of heterogeneous age groups living in a particular town district, and this situation made our research feasible.

Our research attempts to answer the following questions: What are the perceptions of different age groups, particularly older people, regarding selected social dimensions of knowledge, attitudes, skills and practices (KASP) acquired through participatory democratic processes? How do members of self-organized assemblies perceive the intergenerational character of their collaborative public actions in assemblies? What are interviewees' perceptions of intergenerational learning through civic participation in self-organized assemblies?

This article is divided into four sections. The first presents the social aspects of informal intergenerational learning through the participatory democratic process. The second explains the methodology used in the research. The third section presents the research results, and the final section concludes with a discussion and implications.

Informal intergenerational community learning through participatory processes

Since community can be defined as an arena for the activities of diverse people from different generations, various authors (Kump & Jelenc Krašovec, 2014; Longo, 2007; Tett, 2006; Thompson, 2002) have stressed citizens' active participation in community as a means for achieving common good, community renewal, intergenerational solidarity, social equity and/or social change/transformation. These activities implicitly contain intergenerational community learning along with social and collaborative learning for the empowerment of members, for mutually beneficial development and a higher quality of life of all generations. Since intergenerational learning is 'a learning partnership based on reciprocity and mutuality involving people of different ages where the generations work together to gain skills, values and knowledge' (ENIL, 2012:15), it is likely to lead to mutually beneficial learning outcomes, to achieve purposeful and progressive learning.

We have assumed that participation in a deliberative democratic process has the characteristic of intergenerational community learning. Namely, participatory democracy refers to the autonomous, local involvement of people in decisions that affect their lives (Held, 2006), to a 'living democracy' experiment (Fung & Wright, 2003) and to a system of co-governance. In a healthy community, all residents regardless of income, age, gender and culture should find a prosperous and healthy living space (Merriam & Kee, 2014), to which participatory democracy groups aspire. In participatory democracy, 'citizens must participate directly in political decisions' (Santos, 2005:307). 'It is, therefore, a system of co-governance in which civil society, far from being a haven of survival before an absent or hostile state, is rather a regular and well-organized way of exerting public control over the state by means of institutionalized forms of cooperation and conflict' (Santos, 2005:308).

As a very dynamic social and political process, most research on participatory democracy explores its political and democratic virtues (Santos, 2005:357), but not its learning virtues. As indicated elsewhere (Gregorčič & Jelenc Krašovec, 2016), the learning dimensions of a participatory process in local (co-)governance initiatives, particularly in self-organized community assemblies, have not been well-studied. To our knowledge, there are no findings on the intergenerational character of learning through participatory processes. As people of all ages invest a significant amount of time, effort and knowledge in these activities, we have expanded our focus on the importance of researching the 'learning dimensions of community engagement' (Mündel & Schugurensky, 2008:51) to also include intergenerationality and intergenerational dimensions of informal learning.

Schugurensky (2000) conceptualises informal learning as a residual category for learning activities, including self-directed learning, incidental learning and socialization. Informal learning can be self-directed (intentional and conscious), incidental (unintentional but conscious) or happen through socialization as a change of values, attitudes, and dispositions (mostly unintentional and unconscious) (Mündel & Schugurensky, 2008:50). Informal learning most often results in tacit knowledge, especially when it is unintentional and unconscious (Schugurensky, 2006). Serrat *et al.* (2016) who based their research on the findings of Schugurensky and colleagues, through their own research on democratic participation in political organizations,

identified three overarching categories of informal learning: social learning, political learning and instrumental learning. Within social learning they identified five themes (*ibid*:176): the 'ability to listen to and respect others' opinions'; 'a sense of solidarity with and awareness of others'; a 'recognition of the importance of social harmony'; the 'appreciation for the companionship of others' and 'integration into the community'. Through these themes the value of community and the relationship among members were clearly heightened.

In this article, we analyse our research data through the lens of social learning, as defined by Serrat *et al.* (2016). All categories were considered from the perspective of different age groups, where younger, middle and older generations were involved; we attempted to evaluate the outcomes of informal learning through intergenerational participatory democratic process, as perceived by different generations. As the researchers, we considered that members of self-organized assemblies gather regularly with the purpose to improve the circumstances of their lives. It is very difficult to presume possible outcomes of informal intergenerational learning among self-organized assembly members because mutual learning of citizens is mostly unintentional (conscious or unconscious) and the results are hardly ever verbalized.

A short preview of research conducted on the effects of intergenerational educational programmes (for example Kaplan, 2002; Goff, 2004; MacCallum *et al.*, 2006; Tam, 2014) shows various positive outcomes of such mutual cooperation and learning for different age groups. Younger participants:

- gained various knowledge and skills (including social skills), experienced emotional growth, learned about team work and better understood the lessons of the past;
- reported a greater sense of self worth and self respect, while feelings of loneliness and isolation decreased;
- reported increased feelings of social responsibility and optimism;
- developed empathy, creativity, initiative and openness.

The older generation was also positively influenced by intergenerational learning and co-operation. Older participants (defined as 60+ years):

- reported better health, increased levels of activity (also cognitive), using new technologies;

- made friends with younger individuals and developed different perspectives of themselves;
- increased mobility and capacity to solve problems;
- reported increased feelings of self-worth, reduced symptoms of depression, were less lonely, and felt more a part of the community;
- passed on tradition and culture, developed social skills and improved life circumstances.

We assume that participation in self-organized assemblies might be associated with many of the outcomes mentioned above, both for younger as well as for older generations. At the same time, through participation in self-organized groups, members of different age groups can influence community development and change, which is one of the important goals of community learning and cooperation. We also presume that intergenerational exchange occurring through participatory democratic processes encourages citizens of all ages to jointly solve problems in the community, strengthen and revive contact with neighbours, facilitate social cohesion and establish a more inclusive society through the development of social networks and community ties. We argue that the participatory democratic process in the SDC assemblies is accompanied by informal learning, which has the characteristics of mutual, reciprocal learning between participants of different generations, with benefits for both older and younger members of these groups.

Design and methods

Sample

Research was conducted in eight districts in urban communities in Maribor in 2015 and 2016. We investigated two interrelated groups of active citizens: the initiators of a participatory democracy and PB process in Maribor, the so-called 'moderators' working under a City-wide Assembly Initiative (CAI) and assembly members at the SDC. However, the CAI mostly consisted of young people, both men and women, aged between 23 and 40 years, who were predominantly students, working class activists and Non-Governmental Organisation members with extensive experience in direct democracy practices; the group consisted of around 30 activists. In contrast, SDC assembly

members were mostly retirees, aged between 55 and 83 years; men from middle and working class origins, who had fully experienced the socialist period, prevailed. A small number of people under 30 years also attended assembly meetings, but the age group between 30 and 50 years was underrepresented. The SDC consisted of 10-80 assembly members, depending on the problems and open issues in each community. The characteristics of our interviewees are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of 12 interviewees

'Generation'	Gender	Age	Member of	Status	Highest levels of education
1. gen	Female	25	CAI & SDC	student of history	high school
1. gen	Female	30	CAI & SDC	employed; cultural anthropologist and ethnologist	university degree
2. gen	Male	37	CAI & SDC	employed; constructive technician	high school
2. gen	Male	39	CAI & SDC	unemployed; precarious worker in journalism, culture & art	high school
2. gen	Female	55	SDC	self-employed; philologist; professional international humanitarian work	university degree
2. gen	Male	62	SDC	self-employed; lawyer	university degree
3. gen	Male	66	SDC	retired, lawyer	higher education
3. gen	Female	68	CAI & SDC	retired, worked as economist	higher education
3. gen	Female	68	SDC	retired, worked in hospital	high school
3. gen	Male	73	CAI & SDC	retired, worked as economist	higher education
3. gen	Male	77	SDC	retired; worked as technician, ecologist	high school
3. gen	Female	83	SDC	retired; worked as financier	high school

As presented in Table 1, there were two interviewees from the first generation, four from the second (middle) generation and six from the third generation (65+). The youngest interviewee was 25 years old and the oldest was 83. There was one student, two employed persons, two self-employed, one unemployed and six retirees. None of the interviewees had an educational level lower than high school, which for older people in our research means they had above-average level of education (compared to average educational levels of older people in Slovenia).

Instruments and procedure

We used a triangulation of qualitative research methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In an embedded single-case study design with multiple units (Yin, 2012), we researched how and why learning occurred in a particular real-world context, through a participatory process in the SDC assemblies and the CAI meetings. Twelve interviews that lasted between 90 and 120 minutes were supplemented with a focus group that was conducted during an SDC assembly with 12 participants in Nova vas on January 7, 2016, in the community centre where regular SDC assembly meetings had taken place for the last three years.

Besides the questions about the participants' prior history of civic engagement and civic learning, and strengths and weaknesses of the interviewees' engagement in a participatory process, interviewees were asked to list what they gained throughout the process, according to Schugurensky's KASP categories of learning (Schugurensky 2006; 2013). Each indicator was rated on a 5-point Likert scale. For positive changes they could choose 4 (better) or 5 (much better); for negative changes they could choose 2 (worse) or 1 (much worse); number 3 marked the KASP position before they engaged in participatory democratic practices. Further, interviewees were asked to rate 70 indicators of learning and change (in the area of knowledge, attitudes, skills and practice) on the same 5-point Likert scale. The indicators were based on Schugurensky's previous research findings (*ibid.*) and adjusted according to the specific municipality and local/national context. Each interview was concluded with three open questions on community learning and related quality of life.

The interviews were carried out by common consent and in the confidence of the involved persons; their right to privacy and anonymity

was respected. All interviews were transcribed and subjected to content analyses. A coding process was conducted, the concepts were categorized and the analysed material was interpreted.

Results

Regarding the above-mentioned five themes of social learning through democratic participation, introduced by Serrat et al. (2016: 176), 18 indicators (among the 70 researched in our case study) were identified. From all 18 relevant indicators of social learning, only those dealing particularly with the intergenerational dimension of learning in participatory practice are selected and analysed in this article; indicators are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Selected indicators regarding the intergenerational dimension of learning in participatory democratic practice

Rank among 70 indicators	KASP Area	Indicators of Learning & Change	Ave. increase	Social learning categories (Serrat et al., 2016)
4.	Knowledge	knowledge of constructive discussion necessary for consensus reaching	1.50	recognition of the importance of social harmony
6.	Skills	ability to make collective decisions	1.50	recognition of the importance of social harmony
7.	Skills	ability to engage in teamwork and cooperation	1.50	recognition of the importance of social harmony
11.	Skills	ability to achieve consensus	1.42	recognition of the importance of social harmony
15.	Skills	ability to resolve conflicts	1.36	recognition of the importance of social harmony
18.	Skills	ability to intergenerational exchange	1.25	integration into the community
23.	Practice	strengthen intergenerational cooperation	1.25	integration into the community

31.	Skills	ability to relate to neighbours (social skills)	1.00	integration into the community
33.	Attitude	concern for the problems of the neighbourhood	1.00	integration into the community

The average increase for all of the above presented indicators is one or higher than one, which suggests that the interviewees recognized the importance of the change in their intergenerational learning. The 'recognition of the importance of social harmony' (Serrat *et al.*, 2016) is represented in our table with five indicators: the first, 'knowledge of constructive discussion necessary for consensus reaching', ranked high (4) among all indicators with an average increase of 1.50; the other four indicators are skills and include the 'ability to make collective decisions', 'ability to engage in teamwork and cooperation', 'ability to achieve consensus' and 'ability to resolve conflicts', ranked 6, 7, 11 and 15, with an average increase of 1.50, 1.50, 1.42 and 1.36, respectively. 'Integration into the community' (Serrat *et al.*, 2016) includes four indicators with an intergenerational dimension: the first is the skill 'ability to intergenerational exchange', which is ranked 18, and the second is a practice 'strengthen intergenerational cooperation', which is ranked 23, both with an average increase of 1.25; the other two are the social skill 'ability to relate to neighbours', which is ranked 31 and an attitude 'concern for the problems of the neighbourhood', which is ranked 33, both with average increase of 1.00 as a result of participation in the CAI or the SDC.

From the ranking we can reasonably infer that in the opinion of the interviewees, intergenerational cooperation is less important than we might expect. However, further analyses of the interviews, which are presented below, show that there are several reasons for such a ranking result. On one hand, younger people were, before entering the participatory democratic process, basically focused on political topics and were not 'aware' of intergenerational cooperation occurring 'through the participatory process'. However, after being asked about it, they were often surprised about the intensity and importance of the intergenerational dimension of their cooperation and learning. It became clear that to a certain extent intergenerationality was a self-evident,

unconscious and internalised aspect of cooperation in a participatory process. On the other hand, older generations were more aware of the importance of cooperation than younger generations; they entered the process of participatory democracy with the intention of helping younger generations understand the necessity of interconnectedness. In the interviews it was stressed that intergenerational cooperation and learning is a very important and valuable aspect of mutual learning in the self-organized groups in Maribor.

The meaning of the CAI and the SDC in changed social circumstances

Interviewees from all three generations agreed that the CAI and the SDC assemblies brought important social and personal changes to their lives but they also saw their role in the SDC as meaningful for further social change regarding intergenerational solidarity and help. Older people stressed the strained social situation in which young people find themselves now. For many older people and middle-aged adults, participation in the CAI or the SDC is a fight for future generations. An older member of the focus group explained:

*At the moment nothing is good. We, the old ... we are the generation which is quite safe even though we have low pensions; we can babble, nobody can harm us. I'm here because of the grandchildren, and most of us probably, too [...] those children will be slaves if this continues. This is all about our children and grandchildren, not us, our generation. In this sense we all fight ... we are here to push together in right direction.
(Focus group)*

Older interviewees, who themselves grew up and lived in the socialist system, blamed the transition to neoliberal capitalism as a reason for the change in values and the destruction of the spirit of community and solidarity, the basis for the previous system. They stressed the change in values through the transition as the most devastating for the future of younger generations.

Most interviewees (regardless of age) stated that the intergenerational character of the CAI and the SDC groups was one of their important positive characteristics; what counted was their wish to participate in a democratic group of equal members:

It is an intergenerational group, absolutely ... I could say there are the youngest, the middle and we, the oldest. This has some advantages. (woman, 83, SDC, 3. gen.)

However, among the younger generation of interviewees, awareness of the need to strengthen solidarity and connectedness was also strong; it seems that in contemporary society, young people are those who are losing the most. They don't know the previous values system, but they know that what they are experiencing is not good. If the older generations are striving for lost solidarity, the younger generations are discovering something they had never had or done before. Informal learning is deeply embedded in this process; it's an indispensable companion of the process of searching for meaning in life and in relations with others.

Intergenerational cooperation and learning in the CAI and the SDC

Intergenerational networking and collaboration are rooted in the community. Communities are the best places to practice it, and self-organized groups can be thought of as miniaturized communities. Its importance is confirmed by some of the statements of our older interviewees:

I have intergenerational contacts upwards and downwards; with my older friend, who is also a member of SDC, and with moderators, girls, who sacrifice their time for us, for the group. (man, 66, SDC, 3. gen.)

Urban districts are unique points where generations meet. (woman, 83, SDC, 3. gen.)

When asked why they decided to join the CAI or the SDC, most of older interviewees stated that they wanted to stay active, to work with younger people, to solve problems together, one for another. According to Frye Burnham and Perlstein (2002), informal intergenerational learning includes an entire array of ways of reciprocal learning, in which different generations cooperate to establish intergenerational ties with the hope that one or both groups benefit. This kind of intergenerational perspective was also very strongly emphasised among our older interviewees as a reason for joining these groups:

What is important for me is socializing with younger people, but this is not nostalgia for youth; it helps me understand young

people, their new ideas, their view of life, which is different from mine. This influence is extremely positive and I hope my influence on them is equally positive. (man, 73, CAI & SDC, 3. gen.)

As mentioned, younger people are the majority in the CAI; at the time of the research, there were only two older moderators active in the CAI (both were involved in our research). The youngest interviewee discussed the meaning of intergenerational ties as such:

Intergenerational cooperation in CAI – well, we didn't have much choice, the group is as it is, which is perfect. We have C in R in the group (retirees, aged 68 and 73); their stories are absolutely crazy. They have completely different perspectives about the world, different experiences, which our generation don't have and will never have. They take care of us (laughing ...). C is such a mother! In the assembly meetings and in private conversations, intergenerationality is always there. (woman, 25, CAI & SDC, 1. gen.)

Intergenerational community learning

As other authors (Foley, 2001; Mündel & Schugurensky, 2008; Schugurensky, 2006) discovered, it is difficult to verbalise the learning that occurs through participatory processes. However, when asked about the meaning of learning, and also about the manifestation of intergenerational learning, many interviewees verbalised its effects and the process itself:

I have a lot of knowledge which I pass on; others have other kinds of knowledge, which we share. (man, 62, SDC, 2. gen.)

This is a mass social movement in formation, and consequently, learning is crucial. That way people internalize those actions, become empowered ... (man, 39, CAI & SDC, 2. gen.)

You are not alone and you learn something at each assembly meeting. The possibility for such learning is important for me. Your contribution echoes in people's actions, and this is delightful. (woman, 30, CAI & SDC, 1. gen.)

Interviewees and members of the focus group also evaluated the role of community learning for the process of participative democracy. As the

initiators of participatory democratic processes, younger interviewees developed a clearer vision of the meaning of learning as older interviewees:

Mutual learning, absolutely. Each assembly, each meeting is also learning. It connects the group, connects people who didn't know each other before. And at the same time it's personally beneficial. (woman, 25, CAI & SDC, 1. gen.)

For me, learning in the community is crucial; it's learning through the process of co-determination, which includes learning about communication, consensus building, direct actions ... When people internalize those practices, we can talk about democracy. After that people become aware of themselves as parts of personal and social relations in a certain environment, and only then do they start to achieve radical improvements and changes. (man, 39, CAI & SDC, 2. gen.)

Also, the oldest interviewee pointed out the importance of informal learning through social participation in the community:

The one who participates learns a lot. This is learning, where each person who participates gains. It's really a good way of learning; it's in the environment, where you live, and you solve common problems. (woman, 83, SDC, 3. gen.)

Discussion and implications

Within the category of social learning among older people engaging in political participation, Serrat *et al.* (2016:176) identified several factors that also proved to be important in our research, such as a deeper consideration of others' views and acceptance and tolerance of those views, a greater sense of awareness of others and the importance of helping them, and also the wish to feel more connected with others. All our interviewees stressed the importance of solidarity, social harmony and companionship, and the importance of intergenerational cooperation and learning was evident throughout their evaluation of their participation in the SDC and the CAI.

Researchers (Longo, 2007; Tett, 2006; Thompson, 2002) strongly connect community engagement for solidarity, common good, social

equity and inclusion with intergenerational learning, and these perspectives are also clearly expressed by our interviewees. These activities are oriented towards non-biologically linked youth and older adults. In our research, older generations state that the needs and prospects of younger generations are the most important motivation for them to join the CAI and the SDC. They are convinced that SDC assemblies are particularly important for further social change and intergenerational solidarity, which are needed because of the insecurity and dead-end social situation affecting younger generations. Many of our older interviewees and members of the focus group felt they were in a position of not having much to lose and expressed their wish to help younger people and to fight for their rights. They regretted the erosion of positive values and were particularly concerned about the loss of values promoting connectedness and solidarity set in motion during the transition from socialism to neoliberal capitalism. Younger interviewees contemplated the meaning of the SDC and the CAI and confirmed the feeling of personal emptiness and social loss as a result of these changes. They emphasised that before joining self-organized groups they very often felt desperate and excluded, and described the CAI and the SDC as 'their family', demonstrating that they appreciated the intergenerational atmosphere and solidarity expressed by the older generations.

Wenger (1998) emphasises the importance of meaningful experiences as a key product of learning and describes those processes as incentives for forming 'communities of practice'; for Wenger, knowing is a matter of active engagement in the world and being a social being is a central aspect of learning (*ibid.*: 4). Regardless of the different roles of our interviewees (either as moderators or members of assemblies), they greatly appreciated being members of these groups. By entering participatory activities, interviewees stated that they built a community where they found meaning and friends, and grew personally and socially. All interviewees, older and younger, stressed that they are more 'tolerant of the opinions and attitudes of others', more confidential and more patient. They 'searched for consensus' and their 'trust in people increased'.

Various authors (for example Frye Burnham & Perlstein, 2002; Goff, 2004; Illeris, 2004) suggested that the key types of support enhanced by intergenerational cooperation are emotional and social. This is strongly connected particularly to intergenerational learning, which is often considered as a 'reciprocal exchange of knowledge between people of

all ages so they can learn together, and learn from each other' (ENIL, 2012:14) in different spheres. Different types of activities also include friendly and informal social encounters; exchange of experiences, knowledge, know-how and memories; active solidarity towards those in difficulty; and a desire to 'live together' (*ibid*: 15). In their answers, our interviewees emphasised precisely those activities, such as 'exchange of experiences, opinions, connectedness, collective deliberation, ability to understand problems directly, awareness that one can contribute to equality, openness to different people', that seem to be the most important part of their gathering.

A number of our interviewees stressed the intergenerational character of the CAI and the SDC and the associated advantages. Our data showed the openness of older and younger generations to the collaborative struggle for common goals, which they saw as productive and possible. This differs from data from Flash Eurobarometer Intergenerational Solidarity (March, 2009), which showed that EU citizens were most likely to believe that young people and older people do not easily agree on what is best for society (69% agreed). We note that this is not the case in the CAI and the SDC. Although the older interviewees were worried about the low participation of younger generations in SDC, they expressed strong trust and confidence in them. Older interviewees would like to encourage younger people to participate more actively in community actions and self-organized assemblies because they believe collaborative action is the only way to achieve social change. They stressed the privilege of being exposed to different and new ideas of youngsters, which they assessed as extremely positive, while the younger interviewees were enthusiastic about the experience, knowledge and wisdom of the older members.

Although it is difficult to verbalise learning through participatory democratic processes, some of our interviewees clearly confirmed that they learned much and were aware of it; we can therefore confirm the process of tacit learning (Schugurensky, 2006). They stated that learning involved collaborative planning, sharing knowledge, internalizing the meaning of social actions, becoming empowered and therefore initiating new actions. It involved community development activities, activism and social change. Foley (2001:71-72) defines this kind of learning as social, cultural and political. Learning, as verbalized by our interviewees, is exactly this: informal, activist, authentic and primarily emancipatory because it is connected to struggles for equality

and civil rights. It is learning about engagement in community, as defined by Mündel and Schugurensky (2008).

Conclusion

In this paper we have analysed informal learning of different age groups, particularly older people, happening in non-traditional social settings, as self-organized assemblies are. Findings show that (a) being a part of social action groups offer older people an opportunity to learn about younger generations and their values; (b) for many older people, participation in community constitutes an investment into future generations and offer them a sense of solidarity; (c) even if intergenerational cooperation and exchange is not a primary goal of community engagement, these dimensions have substantially and positively changed as a result of participation in mutual deliberation and actions between different generations; (d) collaborative decision making in mixed age groups led to an increased acceptance and tolerance by older and younger members; (e) the knowledge and skills that are necessary for social solidarity, intergenerational cooperation, awareness of others and social harmony increased most notably as a result of participation in the process of self-organization of citizens enhancing engagement in civic society. The lessons learned from this case study are important for further research into older people's motives for being engaged in participatory democratic practices and consequently for research their informal learning.

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